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The Truth Commission according to Chokri Ben Chikha

Performing differential futures from a traumatic colonial past

De Waarheidscommissie volgens Chokri Ben Chikha. De enscenering van differentiële toekomstmodellen vanuit een traumatisch koloniaal verleden

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Varia

The Truth Commission according to Chokri Ben Chikha

Performing differential futures from a traumatic colonial past

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REVEALING THE CULTURAL TRAUMA OF THE EXHIBITED "OTHER"

From 18 until 27 April 2013, the former Court House located at the Koophandelsplein in Ghent hosted *The Truth Commission*. Via Art Centre Vooruit, the spectator could obtain tickets for this site-specific performance that dealt with the shocking history of the exhibited "other" during the 1913 World Exhibition in Ghent. Being performed in a former Court House, *The Truth Commission* seeks to uncover this forgotten part of history and engages the spectator as a belated witness of this cultural trauma. Director Chokri Ben Chikha shares the belief that "performance has the capacity to function as the space in which trauma can be testified about and borne witness to" (Duggan 2012, 93). With *The Truth Commission*, he installed such a testimonial space. By using the format of a truth commission to unwrap the cultural trauma of a colonial past, Ben Chikha not only questions the mechanism and the structure of cultural stereotypes, he also critically investigates the particular ways in which a dominant memory regime[1] – and truth commissions in particular – tend to deal with cultural traumas. Shape-shifting between fiction and reality, between history and storytelling, Ben Chikha and his theatre company Action Zoo Humain not only reveal the humiliating discourse and the blunt stereotypical images of the black "other" in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The performance also points at the ongoing racist discourse and the stereotypical ways of portraying the "other" today.

In this contribution, we discuss the artistic strategies of *The Truth Commission* in relation to recent findings in postcolonial studies and trauma studies. Particular attention will be paid to two important paradigm shifts, namely the post-narrative or post-representative shift on the one hand and the post-positivist shift on the other, and the ways in which these shifts are articulated in a post-dramatic aesthetic.

(1) We introduce the notion of a restrictive representational memory in a response to Radstone and Hodgkin's definition of "memory regime" as "kinds of knowledge and power that are carried, in specific times and places, by particular discourses of memory" (2003, 2).

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_ Three "authentic" Senegalese witnesses in Ghent, 2013.

The Truth Commission is based on exhaustive archival research, and reveals hitherto unknown, staggering material about Europe's colonial past, more specifically in the city of Ghent. 128 Senegalese and 60 Philippine people were exhibited at the 1913 World Exhibition in Ghent, as part of the so-called human zoos. Under the leadership of a French and American impresario, they would travel from one exhibition to the other, with the approval of the French and American colonial superpowers. At least three people died, and there are clear indications that several of the exhibited were exposed to hunger and cold (Jonckheere 2013).

Action Zoo Humain brings forth historical evidence during the staged "event" of a truth commission so that "the cognizance" or "the 'knowing'" of the traumatic colonial past is given birth to (Laub 2013, 57). The traumatic experience lies not only in the physical deprivations of the exhibited "other", but also in the very fact of being exhibited. The exhibition of Senegalese people was mostly supposed to underscore the benevolence of the colonizer. The local press accredited the "excellent" behaviour of the Senegalese to the French colonizer who rescued them from barbarism and Arab slave traders, and provided them with certain education. However, the stereotypical actions of the exhibited "other" in these human zoos in fact consolidated the Western racist discourse of the subordinate black "other" versus the white colonizer's superiority. Bell hooks called this the "colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy" (1990, 28).

Several experts were consulted in the creative process of the performance to provide authentic material that testified of the cultural trauma of the exhibited "other", and these experts are staged as such during the performance, among them an art historian, Dr. Evelien Jonckheere, and an expert in African Languages and Cul-

ture, Dr. Annelies Verdoolaege. Their status as experts guarantees the scientifically sound character of the evidence put on stage. In the end, Ben Chikha's intention is to gather knowledge about the colonial past and to let the spectator become co-owner of that knowledge.

MIMETIC SHIMMERING IN A TRUTH COMMISSION AS THEATRICAL FORMAT

The experts on stage may not be professional actors, but they are definitely gifted speakers. First and foremost, they are playing themselves. Their lack of a background in acting doesn't seem to be a problem. Ben Chikha consciously decided to involve untrained actors into the performance. Herman Balthazar, cast as the president of the Truth Commission, is not a professional actor either. He actually is the former governor of the Province of East-Flanders. Three "authentic" Senegalese, supposed direct descendants of the people who were put on show at the World Exhibition in 1913, listen to the testimonies on the witness stand.

By making use of experts, "authentic" witnesses and archival material as historical evidence on stage, Ben Chikha comes close to the "*neuen Reality Trends auf den Bühnen*" (Le Roy 2012, 248), also called theatre of the real (Martin 2012). This reality-aspect is important in order to testify to the traumatic events and to record them in history.

At first glance, *The Truth Commission* resembles the positivist documentary theatre. Positivist documentary theatre, such as the documentary Agitprop theatre of Erwin Piscator, is founded on exhaustive (archival) research in order to convince the spectator of a truth behind a historical event, a truth that needs to be recovered from the folds of history:

> This theatre reports: it presents facts, shows authentic documents (which are often re-enacted), and draws connections and attempts to convince the audience of a seemingly objective representation of reality. (Le Roy 2012, 248)

This kind of documentary theatre adopts a positivist historiography (Le Roy 2012, 248) and a representational memory regime. Memory scholar Jill Bennett observed how to narrate a traumatic event is connected with representational memory, "with the thinking process and with words – the realm in which events are rendered intelligible, pegged to a common or established frame" (2003, 28; see also Stalpaert 2016, 56).

However, Ben Chikha's theatre takes a post-positivist and post-representative turn. His *Truth Commission* does not claim to reveal the Truth, despite the title of the performance. Ben Chikha is more interested in truth functions than the Truth itself; he is mostly investigating "the conditions of its creation".[2] That is why *The Truth Commission* profoundly unsettles the binary oppositions that are the foundation of a representational memory regime: fiction versus reality, victim versus perpetrator, object versus subject, past versus present, etc.

(2) The "truth" is called truth function in Deleuze's thinking: "a concept always has the truth that falls to it as a function of the conditions of its creation" (Patton 1997, 5).

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_ Herman Balthazar as the president of the Truth Commission.

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_ Ousmane N'Diaye in a dancing scene.

An important unsettling artistic strategy that Action Zoo Humain employs is indeed the blurred distinction between fiction and reality in the mode of acting and the choice of actors. A substantial number of the staged "experts" in *The Truth Commission* are also professional actors or performers in real life. Nonetheless, they profile themselves as ordinary people of flesh and blood. Marijke Pinoy may be a celebrated actress, but she is presenting herself as a mother of five children in the first place. Koen Augustijnen, choreographer of the Sarah Baartman scene, is remarkably present during the performance as both choreographer and spectator. The three "authentic" Senegalese witnesses turn out to be exceptionally skilled performers as they demonstrate their performative capacities in singing and dancing scenes. Their dance training partly explains their confident presence on stage during the performance. The spectator may be less familiar with the fact that Herman Balthazar, the former provincial governor, is also a former actor. He even had a role in plays of Cyriel Buysse, the author who, during the testimonies on stage, is heavily criticized for his inappropriate account of the people he had seen at the 1913 World Exhibition in Ghent. Moreover, the rhetorical qualities developed by Balthazar during his career as provincial governor appeared to be very useful for his role as president of the truth commission. His use of the gavel actually fits him like a glove, drawing from his body-as-archive[3] for performing gestures and/or habits.

The characters in *The Truth Commission* create an alienating mixture between a "genuine human being" and a "powerful performer". It is often unclear exactly which particle of the performer is speaking. Is Herman Balthazar acting? Is he just being himself as former provincial governor? Is he deploying his rhetoric skills? Duggan called this the "mimetic shimmering"[4] at work in a performance:

> The reality of the images as representation shimmers, constantly and rapidly in and out of focus with the perception of the representation as violent reality. The spectator is kept

(3) In 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', André Lepecki suggests that "a body may have always already been nothing other than an archive" (2010, 34); it constantly gathers techniques, movements, habits, bits and pieces of repertoire that are being stored for later use. See also Stalpaert 2011.

(4) Duggan also refers to the notion of "mimetic shimmering" as "shimmering mimesis" or "unsteady mimesis" (2012, 63).

> in a constant state of flux, never deciding on the images as reality or mimesis. [...] The images refuse resolution and definition. Unable to decide if the actions of the performance are real or representational, the spectator might be thought of as caught between equal gravitational pulls at each pole of the three-way tension between present reality – mimesis – imputed presence of the referent, without ever settling at one point or finding equilibrium in the middle. (Duggan 2012, 73)

As a result, the spectators-as-witnesses not only distrust the "reality" status of the actors, they also become suspicious of the "truth" emanating from their story-telling, from their testimonies. In the end, they also become aware of the mechanisms of truth at work in the format of the truth commission itself. The performance hence investigates how "Truth" works in a dominant memory regime by observing the *conditions* of a hyper mastery in *narrating* a traumatic event. In other words, Ben Chikha also seeks to point at the limitations underpinning the narrative, representative and positivist paradigm of the dominant Western memory regime.

Narrative recall is considered the most important tool "in the reconstruction of a life that otherwise suffers from fragmentation and discontinuity" (Butler 2005, 52). As Thompson observed: "constructing a narrative from the pain of the past allows it to be contained or healed" (2009, 45). Master narratives "working through" cultural traumas enable a community "to make meaning out of a chaotic world and the incomprehensible events taking place in it" (Bal 2002, 10). It has been generally acknowledged that truth and reconciliation commissions are an important tool in "acting out" and "working through" cultural traumas. Victims and survivors come to the commission to recount the stories of what happened to them or members of their families, while perpetrators of these abuses can obtain amnesty for the crimes committed if they give full confessions. Truth and Reconciliation Committees therefore deploy a discourse of forgiveness, reconciliation and disclosure. They play a central role in community healing and function as some form of *catharsis*: the community is supposed to come to terms with overwhelming emotions caused by the traumatic past.

However, this inclusive discourse is at the same time exclusive. In her discourse analysis of the South Africa's TRC, for example, Verdoolaege outlined not only its benefits, but also its imperative discourse. She observed how the dominant therapeutic tool of narrative recall "gears" a community towards truth and reconciliation. This imperative master narrative not only maintains or constructs a group's homogeneous and coherent identity; it also excludes differential voices:

> Testifiers expressed themselves in ways that were, to a greater or lesser extent, either appreciated or ignored by the HRV commissioners. [...] The most-preferred utterances were embodied by [...] *ideal testifiers*. It was the discourse of these testifiers that the TRC wanted to capture, to spread to the nation and to preserve for future generations. (Verdoolaege 2008, 167)[5]

(5) Verdoolaege investigates how the TRC exercised power through a reconciliation-oriented discourse. She observed that particular "power relations were created in the course of the HRV hearings" (2008, 38). She built her argument on Foucault's *procedures of restriction* and his belief that "truths are 'normalized' and it is through these normalized truths that power is exercised very effectively" (169).

Instead of proclaiming judgement, Chokri Ben Chikha's *Truth Commission* seeks to postpone it constantly. Ben Chikha also deliberately uses the term "truth commission" instead of "reconciliation commission", since he is not asking for a consensus about the truth of the colonial past. On the contrary, he consciously installs an ambiguity to keep the debate about the trauma of the colonial past in Ghent open and alive, thereby criticizing the debate-numbing politics of reconciliation and consensus. *The Truth Commission* insists on asking pertinent questions: What are the coded actions at work in truth and reconciliation committees? What are the conditions of its master narrative? What is the strategic memory at work? What kind of narrative is impressed upon the commemorators, upon the "victims" and "perpetrators" testifying within a preconceived format? What is the structuring device that maintains a group's homogeneous and coherent identity? Is the process of reconciliation or integration through a process of reconstruction conducted at the cost of different modes of trauma processing or even different perspectives on the traumatic event? These questions put the spectator-as-witness in "a state of constant tension, a state of being perpetually unsettled, and it is a state which is deliberately constructed by the performance" (Duggan 2012, 73-74). It inaugurates an unsettling *undecidability* in perception in a post-dramatic theatre aesthetic.

UNDECIDABILITY IN PERCEPTION

A particular undecidability in perception concerns the spectator's encounter with Chantal Loial's dance solo in *The Truth Commission*, referring to the story of Saartjie Baartman, more commonly known as Sarah Baartman. This solo in the performance, choreographed by Koen Augustijnen, unleashes "a series of paradoxical rotations" (Duggan 2012, 110) in the gaze of the spectator-as-witness. As we will observe, the unsettling *undecidability* that befalls the spectator not only questions the conditions of the hyper mastery at work in truth commissions, it also dismantles the voyeuristic gaze that lies at the heart of "the exhibitionary complex" that is at work in the exhibition modus of the sensationalist human zoos.

The notion of the "exhibitionary complex" has been coined by Tony Bennett in his book *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), in which he describes the growing popularity of exhibition practices in the nineteenth century. This increase is explained as a strategy to propagate the Western discourse of progress through the voyeuristic gaze in what Vanessa Schwartz calls *Spectacular Realities* (1999) – a "spectacle of difference", to use Ben Chikha's words:

> This kind of picture or "*spectacle de la différence*" does not aim at generating more intercultural exchange between the citizens of Ghent and the "exotics". On the contrary, it installs a rigid binary-oppositional division, from a power ratio that is determined by only one of both parties. Staged as an encounter with the Other, the actual intersubjective relationship between exhibited, spectator and maker is a joke. (Ben Chikha 2013)

_ Chantal Loial performing Saartjie Baartman.

The "spectacle of difference" is tackled in *The Truth Commission* with a reference to a historical figure and a famous example of such an exhibited "other". Saartjie Baartman, a black South African woman with stereotypical features – the deep brown colour of her skin, her opulent bosom and her well-set, curving hips – was a popular exhibited "item" in Great Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. With a trial in London in 1810, she was the first to raise awareness for the painful living conditions of people like her. The result of the trial was, however, less successful. The court only consolidated power structures in the colonial gaze by reasoning that Baartman was being paid properly for her services and therefore could not be considered as exploited. In Ben Chikha's *Truth Commission*, Chantal Loial is performing Saartjie Baartman behind glass, next to another exhibited object, namely a painting by an unknown neo-classicist artist. The theatricality of this large-scale painting, representing a scene of human suffering, enforces the dramatic power of the dance by Loial.

This obvious reference to the exhibition modus is also at stake in *Exhibit B* by the South African theatre maker Brett Bailey, in which Saartjie Baartman is impersonated by performer BertheTanwoNjole standing montionless on a slowly rotating

platform. Just like Ben Chikha in *The Truth Commission*, Bailey aims at "unpacking shameful stories of imperialist Europe" (Bailey in an interview on Canvas 2012) by having his performers and visitor-spectators re-enact the blunt voyeuristic gaze of the exhibition modus. Baily takes the performance further by showing how the colonial "we" versus "them" discourse is still at work in contemporary society. A *tableau vivant* displaying the barbarian history of Black slavery is put next to a *tableau vivant* uncovering the painful death of the Nigerian "illegal immigrant" Sémira Adamu, who, chained to airplane seats, (was) suffocated in a pillow on 22 September 1998 after being forcefully put on a plane in Brussels in order to be repatriated. Not much has changed, so Baily seems to say.

Like Ben Chikha, Bailey aims at a blurred distinction between fiction and reality in *Exhibit B*. For the Kunstenfestival Des Arts in 2013, he chose the Gésu church as the location for his performance because "illegal" refugees turned that space into their temporary home some years ago. In doing so, Bailey also pointed at the paradoxical coexistence of high vacancy rates in Brussels and homelessness. In these static re-enactments, the exhibition format unambiguously re-stages an oppositional discourse aligning "victims" and "perpetrators" alongside "performers" and "spectators".

In contrast to Bailey, *The Truth Commission* aimed at inaugurating a more heterogeneous connection of the "we" with the "other" by profoundly unsettling the rigid binary oppositional modus operandi that founds the corner stone of representational memory and stereotypical thinking. In an open letter to Bailey Ben Chikha wrote:

> Is it artistically or socially enriching to use the "zoo humain" to saddle the spectators with a unilateral feeling of guilt? If so, this artistic strategy appears to be pretty successful, judging on the reactions of the audience, myself included. Can guilt, however, be considered as a way to deconstruct the phenomenon of intercultural identity politics? And isn't this, again, a way of excluding the "Other", of disempowering or victimizing him by locking him up in a golden cage [...]? (Ben Chikha 2013)

Following Ben Chikha, the mere re-staging of stereotypes not necessarily deconstructs the mechanism of the imperialist gaze. The historical figure of Saartjie Baartman in *The Truth Commission* is therefore deliberately not stereotypically staged as the "other", nor univocally as "victim". First, she is not wearing the "primitive" grass skirt and she is not half naked. Her brown skin, her bare feet, her voluptuous bottom and her headscarf are nevertheless reminiscent of stereotypical images of black women. Do we project these stereotypes onto the dancing body? Is the colonizing gaze still at work in contemporary theatre performances?

The "kinesthetic power" of the dancing body[6], with Chantal Loial/Saartjie Baartman confidently returning the spectator's gaze, renders an ambiguity in perception that in fact challenges the binary oppositional mechanism of the voyeuristic gaze. The expressive power of Chantal Loial/Saartjie Baartman as performative subject is overwhelmingly unsettling and cannot merely be appropriated by a voyeuristic gaze. This ambiguity in motion is in contrast with the clear-cut stereotypes in and

(6) Dance scholar Susan Manning describes the expressive dance of Isadora Duncan and her contemporaries as the projection of kinesthetic power. This power challenges the male spectator to see the female dancer as an expressive subject rather than an erotic object. "The kinesthesia of early modern dance challenged the voyeuristic gaze", she says (Manning 1997, 163).

the static nature of the *tableaux vivants* in Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B*, where the rotating platform is in fact the only thing "moving". The dancing body of Chantal Loial not only represents the character of Saartjie Baartman as victim. Next to representing a black body on display, she also presents the joy of dancing in itself. Her ambiguous body operates "on a variety of levels" (Fischer 1993, 30). On the one hand, this dancing body is beautiful; it offers "a lush visual surface. The actress is gorgeous and can be appropriated by the male heterosexual look." (Fischer 1993, 30) On the other hand, the kinesthetic power of this dancing body cannot be reduced to a mere object: "something more than this happens. The sequence communicates *her* desire to us, her wish to *act* in a sexual way." (Fischer 1993, 30)

The stereotypical image is mobilized on a number of levels in this scene. First, Chantal Loial is conscious of her role as a performer. She is not simply representing Saartjie Baartman as a representative of a "real black spectacular body". She also demonstrates that she is a very skilful artist. The spectator subsequently cannot simply "read" the dancing body as an image of an African woman testifying of her objectified position on stage, calling upon a long history of colonialism. We read her as a witness and, rapidly thereafter, as a performer mimicking a victim/witness on stage. This immensely powerful image, presented in the exhibition modus of a former Court House in Ghent, rendered theatrical, gives us a strong sense of a stereotypical image *as* theatre performing. As Duggan would put it: "the reality of the event is registered in the bodies of the audience before its mimetic quality is recognized" (2012, 82). He calls this "mimesis in reverse"; the spectator knows the female dancer is put on stage as a "genuine" black women, that she is "part of the theatrical apparatus", but at the same time we cannot deny her performative qualities. This dancing woman-as-witness becomes "entangled in a sticky web": between being herself, being a theatrical sign performing Sarah Baartman and imputing the reality of the existence of other black women on display – in history as well as on the contemporary stage, including *The Truth Commission*.

Second, the theatrical modus of the truth commission has the spectator positioned in a particular way. In contrast to the distant gaze in the human zoos, the spectator in *The Truth Commission* is not only looking; he is also being looked at. Spectators are seated at three sides of the "stage" and some of the actors blend into the audience. Moreover, the dance solo takes place in the back of the auditorium behind the middle part of the audience. The spectators sitting in that area therefore become part of the décor of the dance solo taking place behind them. As such, while watching the solo, the spectator is not only very much aware of the exhibition modus at work in the performance; one also feels the eyes of the other spectators. Being a witness hence also and at the same time means "'to be witnessed' – audience to performer, performer to audience and, crucially, audience to audience" (Duggan 2012, 86).

Third, when Chantal Loial has finished her dance solo, she appears from behind the glass, steps down from the platform on which she has danced, and takes a seat amongst the spectators with the intention to follow the rest of the performance.

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_ Chikri Ben Chikha and Zouzou Ben Chikha in Ghent, 2013.

She shape-shifts in other words from performer-witness into an implicated spectator-as-witness herself. Moreover, a discussion with Koen Augustijnen, choreographer of the dance solo, is started. One of the experts, the actress Marijke Pinoye, reproaches Augustijnen for exploiting the dancer's black body in a contemporary version of the human zoo. Shortly after that, Chokri Ben Chikha, constantly present in the courthouse as a kind of master of ceremony, is blamed for doing exactly the same. We now share Loial's gaze, looking amused at the choreographers put "on trial". At the same time, we also, as implicated spectators are "on trial" here and this has everything to do with implication: we are "not only aware of our ontological presence in the room but also of our complicity in the actions presented" (Duggan 2012, 90). Duggan calls this viewing position the "double being-seen-watching" that constitutes "a basic *implication effect*": "we enter into implicated complicity with what we are seeing and are no longer justified in objectifying ourselves as 'outside' the performance event" (*Ibid.*)

The spectator's gaze is not a univocal voyeuristic gaze, but one full of confusion and unease. In *The Truth Commission*, the visitor-spectator turns into a "spect*actor*", a term introduced by Augusto Boal. By being positioned on a real space rendered

theatrical, and by hence sharing the "stage" with the performers, one feels situated in what Boal calls "a dual reality" (2000, xxi). We exist in the scene, in the theatrical modus of a truth commission and in the real modus of a former court house.

Whereas Bailey's *Exhibit B* forces the spectator to play the game along the pole of the passive onlooker, the dual reality is not geared by oppositional thinking in Ben Chikha's *The Truth Commission*. The tangled web between subject and object, expert and witness, fiction and reality, perpetrator and victim generates a play of super diversity, rather than a play of oppositions. A consequence of this unsteady viewing position for the spectator is a "mimetic shimmering" in perception, "a more complex circulation of tensions than just the dialectic of mimesis and reality" (Duggan 2012, 64-65). The moments of blurred perception are so persistent that there is a fundamental collapse in the mimetic ordering of the performance, disrupting the mechanism of stereotypical thinking.

MANY POSTCOLONIES

The moments of mimetic shimmering and undecidability in (blurred) perception refrain catharsis to take place. In *The Truth Commission*, there is no closure and no "settlement" of mixed emotions as is the case in a dramatic aesthetic. The result is a "post-dramatic" shock to thought, with a culture reconsidering its own mechanisms of oppositional and stereotypical thinking. In that way, Chokri Ben Chikha sides with contemporary postcolonial author-thinkers such as Erwin Jans, Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Wilson Harris, Mohammed Dib en Adrian Johnson who follow the reasoning of Achille Mbembe. Mbembe observed that the word "postcolonial" should be systematically replaced by "postcolony", thereby indicating that "'the' postcolony is, in fact, many postcolonies, and the position one holds in that place is multiple, complex, and in some cases, even contradictory" (Mbembe quoted in Janz 2012, 28).

This radical terminological choice indicates how current postcolonial thinking, such as Ben Chikha's, is distancing itself from the univocal message of an anti-discourse, of "the political ideologies of racial sovereignty and black internationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (*Ibid.*). In *The Truth Commission* this univocal anti-discourse is replaced by an account of a complex individual experience in an equally complex constellation of postcolonies. Following this current postcolonial thinking, people should not be convinced of one Truth, but instead possibilities are being created for developing a perpetual dialogue with heterogeneity. This becoming-postcolonial (Burns and Kaiser 2012, 13), however, does not imply that the colonial past should be neglected, on the contrary. By moving away from a fixation with the colonial past, differential futures can be imagined from an experimental engagement with the present.

Chokri Ben Chikha's performance is then a highly nuanced evocation of the fluctuating oppositions between "us" and the "other". As the oppositional model erodes

in current postcolonial thinking, Rick Dolphijn points out, moralism is replaced by an ethical call for accountability (Dolphijn 2012, 199-216). *The Truth Commission* does not only evolve from a catastrophical past but inaugurates, above all, unpredictable encounters and constantly shifting linkages with social bodies, including the spectator. Ben Chikha's own childhood experiences, his insights into Ghent's colonial past, his vision of Flemish migration policy and his hope for the future are gathered in a constellation where the experience of the dancers and performers may well be informed by the colonial past, but is no longer determined by it. The persistent belief in the possibility of moving forward despite, or even thanks to, the catastrophical past and present of colonization and migration, is in stark contrast with the pessimistic undertone in *Exhibit B*, in which Brett Bailey is merely accusing the "colonizing" spectator. By deconstructing the imperialist gaze and disrupting the spectator's position, *The Truth Commission* exposes the complexity of the debate, thus generating an interesting shift from moralism to ethics.

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